NATION

Water from homes of 26 GBS patients had no chlorine

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India our 2nd largest mkt, should lead in AI: Sam Altman

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CT face off: India look for balance against England

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Exit polls predict BJP's *gharwapsi* in Delhi

BJP eyes comeback after 27 yrs; 2 pollsters say AAP will be the victor; Cong may bag just 1 seat

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Several exit polls on Wednesday predicted a victory for BJP over ruling AAP in Delhi Assembly polls, while Congress was projected to make no significant gains from last elections.

Two exit polls, however, predicted a victory for the AAP

AAP rejected the exit poll results, saying the pollsters have "historically" underestimated its performance, while the BJP termed the predictions an assertion of people's urge for change.

Election Commission will announce the official results after the counting of on 8 February.

Exit polls are projections made by election survey agencies based on interviews of voters as they come out after casting their votes. These may vary widely from the actual results. In the 2020 Delhi polls, most exit polls got their predictions wrong.

Chankya Strategies exit poll said the BJP and allies are likely to get 39-44 seats, the AAP is likely to get 25-28, while Congress may get 2-3.

Two surveys predicted AAP's victory - Wee Preside, which gave 46-52 seats for AAP, 18-23 for BJP and 0-1 for Congress, and Mind Brink Media predicted 44-49 seats for AAP, 21-25 for BJP and 0-1 for the Congress.

The DV Research exit polls predicted 26-34 seats for the AAP, and 36-44 for the BJP and allies, giving zero seats to the Congress.

AAP currently has 62 MLAs, the BJP has eight, and the Congress none.

—PTI

WHAT ARE THE POLLSTERS PREDICTING?

SOURCE	AAP	BJP	CONG
Matrize	32-37	35-40	0-1
People's Pulse	10-19	51-60	0
People's Insight	25-29	40-44	0-1
P-Marq	21-31	39-49	0-1
JVC	22-31	39-45	0-2

TOTAL SEATS 70

MAJORITY 36

- A total of 699 candidates are engaged in a keen battle that would decided whether the AAP comes to power in Delhi for a third consecutive term or the BJP gets a chance to form a government in the national capital after 27 years.

An elderly voter shows her inked finger during the Delhi Assembly elections at Kalkaji in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Delhi records 57.8% turnout amid ID checks of Muslims

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Delhi recorded 57.89 per cent voter turnout in the assembly polls on Wednesday amid allegations that Muslims were not allowed to vote and the IDs of burqa-clad women were checked.

AAP and BJP indulged in intense blame game with both sides alleging voting malpractices in different constituencies.

High drama unfolded in Seelampur when a BJP leader alleged that some people wearing burqas were attempting fraudulent voting, after which police started ID checks of Muslims. Later police denied any fake voting in the area.

In Kasturba Nagar, police sources said two men allegedly attempted to vote fraudulently. They have been apprehended.

Following allegations of fake voting by the BJP in Seelampur, AAP workers resorted to slogan shouting. Additional police and paramilitary forces were also deployed.

Seelampur resident Safdar Ali told PTI that BJP candidate Anil Gaur alleged that people were indulging in fraudulent voting.

"We asked him how was that possible when there are several layers of checking. The officials are checking voter ID cards of everyone and allowing only valid voters inside the polling booth. Later, he left the area and the situation is now normal," he said.

Amid allegations of fraudulent voting, police received PCR call from a woman who alleged that someone had cast a vote in her name at a polling booth in the Aryan Public School of Jafrabad under the Seelampur Assembly segment. Police found out that another woman with a similar name, who lived in the complainant's house as a tenant, had cast the vote. Meanwhile, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Delhi told PTI that a few EVMs were replaced during voting after technical glitches. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

US will take over Gaza: Trump after meeting Bibi

AMERICAN DREAM ENDS

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 5 FEB

In a surprising announcement, President Donald Trump said the US "will take over" the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, "own it" and undertake economic development there that will create "unlimited numbers of jobs and housing".

Trump made these remarks on Tuesday during a joint press conference in the White House with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu standing beside him.

Trump also suggested that the US develop the land but gave no details on who would be allowed to live there.

He also said that all Palestinians currently living in Gaza — around 2 million people — should leave and be placed in other countries in the Middle East.

"The US will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too. We'll own it and be responsible for dismantling all of the dangerous unexploded bombs and other weapons on the site, level the site, and get rid of the destroyed buildings," Trump said.

"Create an economic development that will supply unlimited numbers of jobs and housing for the people of the area, do a real job, do something different," he said.

"The only reason the Palestinians want to go back to Gaza is they have no alternative. It's right now a demolition site... They're living in under fallen concrete that's very dangerous and very precarious. They instead can occupy all of a beautiful area with homes and safety, and they can live out their lives in peace and harmony, instead of having to go back and do it again," Trump said. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 4 & 6

A US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal migrants landed in Amritsar on Wednesday, the first such batch of Indians deported by the Trump government as part of a crackdown. Of the deportees, 33 are from Haryana and Gujarat each, 30 from Punjab, three each from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and two from Chandigarh **PHOTO: PTI**

18-year-old girl gangraped in moving auto in TN

CHENNAI, 5 FEB

An 18-year-old girl was sexually assaulted in a moving autorickshaw in Salem, late on Monday night. Police said they are reviewing CCTV footage and are close to apprehending the three suspects.

According to reports, the girl, a migrant from another state was waiting for a bus at Kilambakkam bus terminal when an auto driver approached her and offered a ride. The girl refused, but the auto driver then dragged her into the vehicle. Soon, two more men got into the vehicle and allegedly sexually assaulted her at knifepoint.

The woman was heard screaming as the autorickshaw drove through roads. Passerbys, hearing her screams, alerted the police prompting a team of police to start chasing the vehicle. The accused dumped the girl on the side of the road and fled the scene.

The girl received support from a passer-by cop.

Hitting out at the DMK government, Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai said sexual assault in the state had become a "horrifying reality".

This incident occurred a month after the sexual assault on Anna University campus that sparked a massive political row. *—Salar News*

PM AT KUMBH

PM Narendra Modi takes a holy dip at Sangam during Maha Kumbh, in Prayagraj on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Tirumala fires 18 non-Hindu staff

TIRUPATI, 5 FEB

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has initiated action against 18 non-Hindu employees for failing to adhere to Hindu religious practices while participating in TTD festivals and rituals.

These 18 non-Hindu staff members include a principal, professor, lecturers, nurses, and other staff working in the colleges, hospitals, and hostels run by the Tirumala Trust Board.

TTD, which is the top governing body of the Tirupati Temple, has the 18 workers from participating in the Tirumala temple fairs and festivals and other religious functions and activities to protect sanctity and sentiments of devotees of the presiding deity Lord Sri Venkateswara.

According to a statement from TTD, the action was taken under the direction of TTD Chairman BR Naidu.

Apart from that, as part of the decision to preserve the spiritual integrity of TTD's operations, the Board has proposed transfers to other government departments or voluntary retirement for these employees.

Earlier, in November 2024, the TTD board also passed another resolution which requires non-Hindus employed by the board to either take voluntary retirement or opt for a transfer to other government departments in Andhra. The board has also passed a resolution prohibiting political statements within Tirumala, stating that action will be taken against violators as well as those who propagate them. *—ANI*

Billionaire Ismaili Muslim leader Aga Khan dies at 88

PARIS, 5 FEB

Aga Khan, who became the spiritual leader of the world's millions of Ismaili Muslims at age 20 as a Harvard undergraduate and poured a material empire built on billions of dollars in tithes into building homes, hospitals and schools in developing countries, died Tuesday. He was 88.

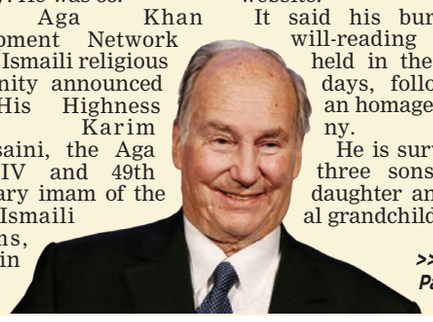
His Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili religious community announced that His Highness Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, the Aga Khan IV and 49th hereditary imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, died in Portugal surrounded by his family.

His successor was designated in his will, which will be read in the presence of his family and religious leaders in Lisbon before the name is made public. The successor is chosen from among his male progeny or other relatives, according to the Ismaili community's website.

It said his burial and will-reading will be held in the coming days, followed by an homage ceremony.

He is survived by three sons and a daughter and several grandchildren. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5 & 6



NO ACTION YET

Haveri nurse ditches stitches for Fevikwik to treat boy's injury

HAVERI, 5 FEB

A nurese at a primary health centre in Haveri applied Fevikwik to a child's deep wound instead of stitching it, causing severe pain to the 7-year-old boy.

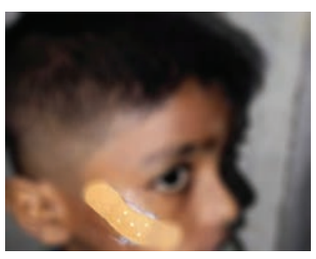
On 14 January, Gurushikan Annappa Hosamani, a resident of Aduru, sustained a deep neck injury while playing. His parents rushed him to the Aduru Primary Health Centre for treatment, where the nurse, Jyoti, was on duty as no doctor was available. Rather than stitching the wound, the nurse allegedly applied Fevikwik, dressed the wound and sent him home.

The boy experienced pain while trying to remove the bandage, prompting his parents and local villagers to protest . They recorded a video of the nurse's actions and filed a complaint with the Health Protection Committee of the centre. Following this, the committee issued a notice to Jyoti.

Haveri District Health Officer Rajesh Suragihalli transferred her to another health centre in Guttal but did not suspend her.

When confronted about her actions, Nurse Jyoti defended herself, claiming that applying Fevikwik to the surface of the skin was the correct approach. She dismissed concerns about the chemical's potential harm and arrogantly suggested that if the parents disagreed, they could have sought alternative treatment. She also implied that if the parents were so smart, they could have refused the treatment and taken the child to another place. The boy's family has demanded Jyoti's suspension, accusing her of negligence and a lack of knowledge. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR



Fin Ministry bans ChatGPT, DeepSeek for its officers

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Finance Ministry has directed its officers not to download or use AI tools and apps such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek in office computers and devices, saying they pose confidentiality risks to data and documents.

In a communication in January to all its departments, the ministry said AI tools/AI apps in office devices may be strictly avoided.

"It has been determined that AI tools and AI apps (such as ChatGPT, DeepSeek etc) in the office computers and devices pose risks for confidentiality of Govt, data and documents," Department of Expenditure under the ministry said in a note on 29 January.

The move comes at a time when countries like Australia and Italy have shielded their official systems from Chinese DeepSeek over privacy and data safety concerns.

Currently, Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, which has developed artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT is on a whirlwind tour to India.

He is meeting top government officials, industry captains and participated in a fireside chat on Wednesday morning. DeepSeek's latest AI offering has drawn global attention for its low-cost model – at just USD 6 million against global average of billions of dollars. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

PHOTO: SALAR

5 killed as bike collides with KSRTC bus in Yadgir

YADGIR, 5 FEB

Five members of a family, including three children, died when a Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation bus collided with their bike near Tinthani in Surpur on Wednesday. The deceased have been identified as couples Anjaneya, 35, and Gangamma, 28; their one-year-old son Hanumantu and their relatives' children Pavithra, 5, and Rayappa, 3 – all residents of Halisagar in Shahapur. The impact of the collision crushed the bike. Three people died on the spot, while the other two, who were critically injured, succumbed in the hospital. Police have filed a case and are investigating the incident. —*PTI*

Drunk man bludgeons wife to death in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 5 FEB

Police in Belagavi have arrested a man in Upparatti village of Gokak taluk of the district for bludgeoning to death his wife with a stone in a state of intoxication. Police have identified the deceased as Mirabai Kabali, 25, a native of Maharashtra, and her husband as Balaji Kabali, 35. The couple has two children. The police said Balaji made a video of the murder and sent it to his wife's relatives. They have seized the mobile phone on which the video was recorded. Gokak Rural police have registered a case and are investigating. —*Salar News*

Man pays ₹1.6 lakh fine for 311 traffic violations

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

A scooter rider in the city ended up paying a Rs 1.6 lakh fine for 311 pending traffic violation cases against him after the Bengaluru Traffic Police seized his gearless scooter, officials said. The fine receipts, when put together, measured about 20 meters, they said. On Monday, the City Market Traffic Police seized the vehicle and issued a notice to the violator, directing him to clear his pending fines, they added. Taking to 'X', the traffic police stated that the owner of the scooterwas traced and the vehicle was taken into police custody. —*Salar News*

Kerala medical student ends life in City college hostel

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

A 19-year-old nursing student died by suicide, hanging herself from a ceiling fan inside her hostel room at her college in Ramanagara, on the outskirts of the city, police said on Wednesday. The deceased, identified as Anamika Vineeth, who hailed from Kannur in Kerala, was a first-year B Sc student at the Medical College, they said. According to the police, she was found hanging inside her hostel room on Tuesday night. —*PTI*

DRAVID FUMES AT AUTO DRIVER

In a viral video, former cricketer Rahul Dravid was seen arguing with an auto driver on Cunningham Road in Bengaluru. Dravid was seen arguing in Kannada, asking the driver why he did not apply the brakes. Former head coach was visibly upset over scratches and possibly dents on his vehicle. —*PTI*

HC sends notice to banks on Mallya's loan recovery plea

He says banks recovered ₹6,200cr debt 'multiple times'

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

High Court on Wednesday issued a notice to banks in response to a petition filed by fugitive liquor baron Vijay Mallya.

The petition seeks a statement of accounts detailing the amounts recovered from him, United Breweries Holdings Limited (UBHL, now in liquidation), and other certificate debtors.

Justice R Devdas directed the banks to respond by 13 February.

Senior advocate Sajan Poovayya, representing Mallya, argued that the winding-up order against Kingfisher Airlines and its holding company, UBHL, had been upheld at all judicial levels, including the Supreme Court.

He contended that the debts had already been recovered, yet additional recovery proceedings continued against Mallya. Poovaiah informed the court that a debt recovery tribunal (DRT) had ordered Kingfisher Airlines, as the primary debtor, and UBHL, as the guarantor, to pay Rs 6,200 crore. "That order attained finality. However, between 2017 and now, the Rs 6,200 crore has been recovered multiple times over. According to an admitted statement, as of today, the recovery officer confirms that Rs 10,200 crore has been recovered. Additionally, the official liquidator states that the banks have regained their dues, and even the Finance Minister informed Parliament that Rs 14,000 crore has been recovered," he stated. He clarified that the petition does not dispute the repayment of loans, but argues that under the Companies Act, once the debt is fully repaid, the guarantor company (UBHL) has no remaining liability and can seek revival. However, this process requires a certification from the recovery officer confirming that the debt has been fully settled, which has not yet been issued. Meanwhile, recoveries continue without clarity on whether the primary debt has been entirely paid.

Additionally, it seeks a record of any assets belonging to Mallya, UBHL, or third parties that remain with the banks but have not yet been utilised for loan recovery.

As an interim relief, the petition also seeks a stay on any further asset sales by banks under the amended recovery certificate until clarity is provided on the full settlement of the debt. —*PTI*

Banks have been asked to respond by 13 February PHOTO: PTI

Parameshwara rejects claims of CM change this year

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Parameshwara PHOTO: PTI

Rejecting claims of a Chief Ministerial change in Karnataka later this year, Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said there was no indication of such change within the ruling Congress party.

He was responding to a claim made by the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, R Ashoka, who stated that CM Siddaramaiah would be replaced by November 15 or 16 this year.

Speculation about a leadership change in the Congress party had been rife over the past few months, with several members, including ministers, openly speaking to the media on the issue.

However, such remarks have largely stopped following strict instructions from AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge.

When asked about plans for a second airport in Bengaluru, the Home Minister said the minister concerned, MB Patil, had already begun preparations, and a proposal would be sent to the centre.

Regarding his preference for the second airport to be built near Tumakuru, while others have suggested a site near Bidadi, Parameshwara said, "We have made our demand, and others have made theirs. The civil aviation department will determine which location is most feasible." Noting that the current Kempegowda International Airport at Devanahalli was initially proposed near Bidadi, he said, "However, the DGCA rejected it at the time due to technical reasons. Now, it remains to be seen whether Bidadi will be reconsidered." —*PTI*

BJP won't win 10 seats without Vijayendra: Renukacharya group

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

The BJP faction, led by former minister MP Renukacharya, pledged their support to incumbent state chief BY Vijayendra. They said the BJP would not win even ten seats in the assembly elections if Vijayendra is removed.

The group led Renukacharya threw its weight behind Vijayendra amid a factional rift in the BJP state unit where the rival group headed by Basanagouda Patil Yatnal has been pressing for Vijayendra's removal. "We held an emergency meeting today. On 12 February, we will gather in large numbers go to Delhi." he said. "We will seek time from the leaders and request them to control Yatnal and others." The faction consisting of several former ministers and legislators, including Katta Subramanya Naidu, Sampangi, Hartal Halappa, Roopali Naik, Basavaraj Dadesugur among others, said they would meet the high command over the matter.

"You (Yatnal faction) should be ashamed. Criticising Vijayendra and BS Yediyurappa (Vijayendra's father) is the same as criticising Nadda, Amit Shah, and Modi. Today, you criticise Vijayendra and Yediyurappa, and tomorrow you will criticise Narendra Modi, Shah, and Nadda," Renukacharya said. Noting that the party lost in the 2023 Assembly polls due to internal fighting, he said, "If Vijayendra is made to step down, BJP won't get even ten seats. National leaders know the situation; they won't remove Vijayendra, and he will continue as the president." "We are ashamed of Yatnal faction's conduct. People, including the Congress, are questioning us," he added. —*PTI*

BETTER SCHOOLS

Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti with IT BT Minister Priyank Kharge and others took a look at the models of schools under NAREGA during a programme in Bengaluru on Wednesday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

My Kumbh Mela visit is personal: DKS

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Hitting back at comments regarding his plans to visit the ongoing Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday said that no one has the right to question his personal beliefs and devotion.

Shivakumar was responding to remarks by Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, R Ashoka, who commented on reports about his plans to visit the Kumbh Mela while attempting to link it to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge's recent statement. "Water has no colour, taste, or shape, and everyone needs water. People say whatever they want—I don't know what his (Ashoka's) issue is. Maybe he has some problem. No one has the right to speak about my personal beliefs. My belief and devotion are my personal matters," he said. He also called for building pressure on the Union government and University Grants Commission to withdraw the flawed National Education Police. Meanwhile, District Minister Chaluvarayaswamy hit back at Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy saying that instead of predicting the future of others, Kumaraswamy should focus on his political future. —*PTI*

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Kalaburagi inmate gets out of jail using his earned wages

KALABURAGI, 5 FEB

Chief Jail Superintendent of Kalaburagi District Prison R Anita has helped an inmate unite with his family after he was issued a release order on the basis of good conduct, but was not in a position to pay the fine ordered by the court because he did not have close relatives to help him.

Durgaappa, 65, a resident of Jantapur village in Lingsugur taluk of Raichur district, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2013 for a crime committed in 2012. The court had also imposed a fine of Rs 1.1 lakh, with an additional one year and six months of imprisonment if he failed to pay it.

While serving his sentence at Kalaburagi Central Prison, he was granted release in 2024 based on good conduct.

Durgaappa worked as a cook in the prison, and his wages had accumulated to Rs 2.80 lakh. Finding that his account was in a distant location, Anita contacted officials and arranged staff to accompany Durgaappa to withdraw the funds. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Centre yet to approve AIIMS for Raichur: Minister

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Minister N S Boseraju said that despite a relentless 1,000-day-long struggle and multiple appeals from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, ministers, and elected representatives, the Centre has failed to provide a positive response regarding the sanctioning of an AIIMS in Raichur.

"Our government has made more than ten official requests at various levels to sanction AIIMS for Raichur. On 22 August, 2023, a delegation—including myself and the Minister in charge of Raichur—met the Union Health Minister and submitted a formal request." he said.

"Despite these efforts, the Union Finance Ministry continues to delay and hesitate," he said. In response to a letter sent by CM Siddaramaiah, the minister said the Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda suggested improving healthcare facilities in the Kalyan Karnataka region through grants under the National Health Mission (NHM). —*PTI*

12 bonded labourers from MP rescued in C'magaluru

ASHOKNAGAR, 5 FEB

Twelve labourers from Madhya Pradesh held captive in a coffee plantation in Chikkamagaluru have been rescued. The labourers were working in Chikkamagaluru like bonded labourers after their contractor escaped with an advance payment of Rs. 90,000 from the management of the plantation. "After tracing the location of the labourers, we contacted Jayapura police station in Chikkamagaluru district and with the help of local cops, 12 labourers were rescued and brought back to MP," Ashoknagar police station in-charge Manish Sharma said, adding that a team of MP police visited the district to track down the labourers. All the labourers belong to the Ashoknagar district in Madhya Pradesh.

The contractor, identified as Afsar Ali was later nabbed and brought to Ashoknagar. A court has remanded him in judicial custody.

Ali allegedly took the labourers to Karnataka by taking an advance payment of Rs 90,000 from the management of the coffee plantation.

However, he escaped from there. More individuals are reported to working in the same manner and police are investigating the case, Sharma added. —*PTI*

IT dept raids at least 30 locations across State

MYSURU/ BENGALURU, 5 FEB

The Income Tax Department conducted 30 raids across the state, including in Bengaluru and Mysuru on Wednesday. The officials raided the residences and offices of businessmen and contractors who are suspected of tax evasion and submitting false documentation to the IT Department.

In one instance, a team of 10 IT officers raided the house and properties of a contractor based in Mysuru, sources said. The officials were carrying out search and seizure operations for documents and property records.

The contractor, who owns a brick factory and has other businesses, had won multiple bids for government projects. The officials will be conducting raids at the contractor's residence and M Pro Palace Hotel and a choultry at Deve Gowda Circle in Mysuru.

Details of the raids in Bengaluru and other parts of the state are yet to be disclosed and no official statement has been issued.

PHOTO: PTI

- In one instance, a team of 10 IT officers raided the house and properties of a contractor based in Mysuru

This operations follows a crackdown by the IT Department last year. They had conducted 50 simultaneous raids in Bengaluru on 12 October, 2024, where they targeted the offices and residences of jewellers. On 27 September, 2024, IT officials raided more than 10 corporate companies in Bengaluru. —*Agencies*

Aero India: Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team to perform

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

The Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT) will perform at the much-awaited Aero India show, scheduled to take place at the Yelahanka Air Force Station in Bengaluru from 10-14 February, officials said on Wednesday.

The team comprises nine Hawk Mk 132 aircraft, licensed-manufactured in India, flying in extremely close proximity, at a distance of less than five meters.

"The SKAT', is renowned for its precision, skill, and teamwork. This team, flying the striking red-and-white Hawk Mk 132 jets, will showcase a series of jaw-dropping manoeuvres. From the graceful loop and the thrilling barrel roll to the gravity-defying inverted flying every performance is a testament to the pilots' unmatched expertise and coordination," an official statement from the Defence Wing of the PIB said. —*PTI*

HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT

Govt launches own elephant radio collar

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre on Wednesday launched KP Tracker-- an indigenous GSM-based elephant radio collar--developed by the Forest Department in collaboration with Infiction Labs Pvt Ltd for monitoring elephants to effectively mitigate human-elephant conflicts.

These newly launched Karnataka Researched Trackers (or Karnataka Produced Trackers) are cost-effective radio collars that are readily available for immediate deployment. They have been made using locally sourced, environmentally friendly materials to ensure a reduced ecological impact, officials said. Citing incidents of elephants roaming in Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, and Hassan, the minister said that locals will now be informed about elephant movements through the use of indigenously made radio collars fitted to female elephants, which usually lead the herd. This initiative is expected to help curb the elephant menace. These radio collars have now been handed over to the officials of Bandipur and Nagarhole Tiger Reserves.

According to him, with 6,395 elephants, Karnataka has the highest elephant population. However, since forest cover is not expanding in proportion to the growing elephant population, human-elephant conflicts are on rise. —*PTI*

Radio collars have now been handed over to the officials of Bandipur and Nagarhole Tiger Reserves PHOTO: PTI

FIR against Amanatullah Khan for MCC violation

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Delhi Police has registered a case against AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan for violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in place for Delhi assembly polls, police said on Wednesday. This came hours before voting went underway in Delhi on Wednesday morning. Khan is the AAP candidate from Okhla. An FIR was lodged at Jamia Nagar Police Station after a video surfaced online purportedly showing him distributing stickers and election materials in the Batla House area late night on Tuesday, a police source said. "Based on the video and subsequent investigation, an FIR has been registered. Further inquiries and investigation are underway," the source added. Campaigning for the assembly polls ended on Monday evening. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Democracy fails if Guv doesn't assent to bills: TN to SC

CHENNAI, 5 FEB

The Tamil Nadu government has informed the Supreme Court that Governor R N Ravi withholding its assent to bills passed by the legislative assembly for the second time would lead to failure of democratic system in the country. A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan was hearing two petitions filed by the Tamil Nadu government over its lingering confrontation with the Governor on the issue of assent to bills passed by the assembly. Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the state government said if the state legislature passes the bill, the Governor could ask for a reconsideration, but had to other option but to grant assent on the revised version. *—PTI*

President Droupadi Murmu, Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, BJP candidate Parvesh Verma, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, AAP leader Manish Sisodia, Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice Sanjiv Khanna, BJP candidates Ramesh Bidhuri and Vijendra Gupta show their inked fingers after voting, on Wednesday **PHOTOS: PTI**

AAP claims voters subdued, BJP hits back

EC says some EVMs were replaced due to technical glitch; BJP claims AAP workers torched shanty

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

As Delhi voters cast their ballots for the Assembly polls on Wednesday, AAP candidate from Greater Kailash claimed people were being stopped from voting in Chirag Dilli and Manish Sisodia alleged money was being distributed from a house in Jungpura.

Meanwhile, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Delhi told PTI that a few EVMs were replaced during voting after technical glitches.

Saurabh Bharadwaj, claimed police had barricaded the Chirag Dilli area, preventing people from voting. He shared a video on X showing a woman sitting in an autorickshaw near a barricade, alleging that the obstruction was deliberately placed to prevent access to the polling station.

Delhi police said only the elderly and those who cannot walk were allowed to go to polling booth in vehicles but others were stopped outside the EC-mandated 200m radius.

Delhi BJP, in a post on X, alleged that AAP workers torched the shanty of a party worker at Kalandar Colony in Shahdara.

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva claimed that AAP has stooped to "fake voting" as it was rattled by its "imminent defeat".

New Delhi district election office said in a post on X that some alleged instances of relievers of polling agents not being allowed inside polling booths were reported by political parties.

"However, on-ground verification revealed that polling agents inside were unwilling to come out, which prevented relievers from being accommodated. Sector officers and presiding officers have been sensitized to ensure the smooth relieving of polling agents," it said.

The BJP's New Delhi seat candidate Parvesh Verma took to X to accuse Sisodia of resorting to "hooliganism" as he shared a video purportedly showing the AAP leader angrily demanding action against BJP workers. Scared of defeat, AAP leaders are now showing "pettiness", he charged.

After verification, the presiding officer allowed both of them to vote, police said. *—PTI*

AAP MLA Mohaniya booked for 'blowing kisses' at woman

AAP MLA Dinesh Mohaniya has been booked by the Delhi Police for allegedly misbehaving with a woman, making inappropriate gestures, and blowing flying kisses. The case was registered under Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita (BNS) at the Sangam Vihar Police Station. "A woman filed a case at Sangam Vihar Police Station against AAP MLA Dinesh Mohaniya for giving a flying kiss to her. Delhi Police registered a case under sections 323/341/509," ANI quoted Delhi Police sources as saying. Dinesh Mohaniya, the sitting MLA from Sangam Vihar, is also contesting the seat again as the AAP candidate. He is up against BJP's Chandan Kumar Choudhary and Congress' Harsh Choudhary. *—Agencies*

ELDERLY VOTERS SEEK IMPROVED HEALTHCARE FACILITIES, ROADS

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Elderly voters, accompanied by their family members or police personnel, stepped out to exercise their franchise in the Delhi Assembly polls on Wednesday.

Former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal escorted his elderly parents, who were in wheelchairs, to the polling station.

Asif, 83, and his 80-year-old wife Masra Asand arrived at a polling station in Shaheen Bagh with their grandchild. The wheelchair-bound couple also encouraged others to cast their votes.

"Everyone is working hard to earn a living and support their families but the condition of roads and sanitation remains a major concern. These issues should be prioritised. Other than that, we are not expecting any major changes," they said.

Shaukat Ali, a 91-year-old resident of Zaffrabad in northeast Delhi, wants better healthcare facilities for the elderly.

"The healthcare facilities are in a bad state. One has to stand in long queues to get treatment. People who use their contacts are preferred while the common man keeps waiting their turn," he told PTI.

In Kalkaji, 85-year-old Ram Pyari was escorted to the booth by her 62-year-old daughter Reena. *—PTI*

A police personnel talks to burqa-clad women waiting to cast their votes at Seelampur; A voter being assisted by police personnel as he arrives to cast his vote for the Delhi Assembly elections, on Wednesday **PHOTOS: PTI**

Shah: Tripura now peaceful, 'land-linked'

AGARTALA, 5 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah asserted that Tripura has become 'land-linked' from being landlocked and pacts with outlawed groups have brought peace and prosperity to the state. Virtually addressing from an appointment letter distribution programme of the Tripura government in Agartala, Shah asserted that BJP-led coalition government in the state has achieved more in the last seven years than what previous parties did during several decades of their rule. Meanwhile, Shah, chairing two high-level review meetings on the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, said the ecosystem of terror has been weakened due to the sustained and coordinated efforts. *—PTI*

'Cops checking voter IDs in Milikipur'

LUCKNOW, 5 FEB

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav claimed that police personnel were checking voters' IDs in Milkipur constituency, where polling is underway for the assembly by-election, to "create fear" among them and urged the Election Commission to immediately remove them.

In a post on X, Yadav shared a picture of a police officer checking the ID card of a person outside a polling booth.

"The Election Commission should immediately take cognisance of the pictures of Ayodhya police checking the ID cards of voters in Milkipur, in which senior police officers are also involved," Yadav said in his post in Hindi. "This crime is indirectly influencing voting by creating fear among voters and is a crime against democracy. Such people should be removed immediately and punitive action should be taken," he said.

Talking to reporters, Faizabad MP Awadhesh Prasad alleged that the BJP was creating pressure on officers to influence and threaten voters.

Ayodhya Senior Superintendent of Police Raj Karan Nayyar denied the allegations and said the person whose ID card is being checked in the said picture is a polling agent.

Although there are 10 candidates in the fray, the main contest is between SP's Ajit Prasad and BJP's Chandrabhanu Paswan.

The bypoll was necessitated after SP's Awadhesh Prasad vacated the seat after winning the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. *—PTI*

Polling peaceful in Erode East bypoll

ERODE, 5 FEB

Voting for the bypoll for the Erode East Assembly constituency concluded here on Wednesday peacefully and the voter turnout is expected to cross at least 65 per cent, election authorities said.

People turned up enthusiastically at the polling stations to cast their votes in the bypoll to the Erode East segment and those who were in the queue at the closing time were issued tokens and allowed to vote, they said. The polling was held from 7 am to 6 pm and during afternoon the voting was sluggish.

65% voter turnout

The allegation of a woman voter that someone impersonated her and hence, she could not vote and the allegations and counter-allegations of the ruling DMK and Naam Tamizhar Katchi caught attention, and they briefly resorted to road roko, leading to anxious moments.

Three EVMs were used as 46 candidates, including 44 independents, are in the fray and the contest appears to be only between the ruling DMK's VC Chandirakumar and Tamil nationalist party, Naam Tamizhar Katchi's (NTK) M K Seethalakshmi.

Opposition parties, including main opposition AIADMK have boycotted the polls.

Erode East segment has a total of 2,27,546 voters. Nine booths, declared sensitive saw additional deployment of security personnel.

Officials said polling was stopped for ten minutes at the Brahmana Periya Agraharam polling station due to a technical fault in an EVM and it was replaced with another machine. *—PTI*

Want Dalits, weaker sections in power: RaGa

PATNA, 5 FEB

LoP in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi highlighted the need for the representation of Dalit and weaker sections in positions of power, as he reiterated the need for a country-wide caste census. Gandhi was speaking at the birth anniversary function of freedom fighter and Dalit icon Jaglal Choudhary.

"There is no participation of Dalits and the downtrodden in the present power structure and institutions of the country. There is a need for a caste census across India." he said. "There is no Dalit among the country's billionaires."

"You can see Prime Minister Narendra Modi bowing before the Constitution and the statue of Ambedkar. Many RSS leaders also sing paeans to Ambedkar. They do so while working against the very ideals that Ambedkar espoused," claimed Gandhi.

Gandhi said that the number of Dalits is in top positions is negligible in media and educational institution, a reason why their problems do not get highlighted.

"I am waiting for the day when Dalits and weaker sections will be in leadership position in every institution of the country." He said. "The public health network in the country, which was meant to serve the needs of common people, is giving way to private hospitals."

Waving a pocket-size edition of the Constitution, he said, "As long as this is in force, Dalits and other deprived sections of the society can hope for a better life." *—PTI*

RG Kar case: Parents call for protest on 9 Feb

KOLKATA, 5 FEB

Parents of the woman doctor who was brutally killed and raped at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital last year urged people to take to the roads demanding justice for their daughter on her 32nd birthday on 9 February. In a video statement, the parents said they will continue fighting until their daughter gets justice. "For the last six months, we have been fighting for justice for our daughter. We are the parents of an unfortunate daughter whose dreams were dashed. On 9 February, she would have turned 32. That day we take to the roads protesting the delay of justice," the mother said. She also thanked everybody who supported them and participated in their demands for justice since the incident took place on 9 August last year. *—PTI*

BENGAL GLOBAL BUSINESS SUMMIT

Didi bags Rs 1L cr investment pledge from industries

KOLKATA, 5 FEB

An investment pledge of Rs 50,000 crore in West Bengal by "the end of the decade" from Reliance Industries and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's announcement of the state's infrastructure readiness to begin extraction from the Deocha-Pachami coal block "as early as tomorrow" formed the highlights of the inaugural day of the state's flagship business conclave.

Speaking on the first day of the eighth edition of the Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS), Banerjee also announced the formation of a new state-level synergy committee to facilitate ease of doing business. She later called the day's session a "majestic and stupendous success".

"I am announcing the formation of a new state-level synergy committee to facilitate ease of doing business in the state. It will be chaired by the chief secretary. It will be a one-stop destination for all forms of clearance for doing business in Bengal," she said.

Stressing the state's business-friendly environment, Banerjee said, "We have a stable government in Bengal, where no man-days are lost. There are no strikes in Bengal. The work culture has returned."

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Reliance to invest Rs 50,000cr

Mukesh Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries, delivered a powerful endorsement of West Bengal's growth potential at the Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) 2025, pledging to invest Rs 50,000 crore in the state by the end of this decade.

JSW Group

JSW Group also made a commitment to Bengal, with Chairman Sajjan Jindal announcing a Rs 16,000 crore investment to develop a 1,600 MW power project at Salboni.

ITC

ITC Ltd's unveiled global centre of excellence for artificial intelligence in the New Town area of Kolkata.

The centre was virtually inaugurated by Banerjee, and ITC Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Puri praised Bengal's potential for investments. *—PTI*

Bhutan PM skips Bengal Biz Summit

Kolkata, 5 Feb

A minister from Bhutan on Wednesday represented the country at the Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) instead of Prime Minister Dasho Tshering Tobgay, who was earlier expected to attend the event. Bhutan's Agriculture Minister Younten Phuntsho participated in the summit on behalf of the country. *—PTI*

Tukaram's descendant kills self

PUNE, 5 FEB

Shirish More Maharaj, 32, a kirtan performer and descendant of 17th century Marathi poet-saint Tukaram, allegedly ended his life here, police said on Wednesday. The suicide note found at his home in Dehu Road area said he was taking the extreme step due to financial distress. "On Wednesday morning, when his parents knocked on the door of his room on the first floor of the house, there was no response. They alerted the police, who arrived and broke open the door, only to find More Maharaj hanging from the ceiling," said an official of Pimpri Chinchwad Police. *—PTI*

Just 1 live-in filed in 10 days after UCC implementation

DEHRADUN, 5 FEB

Only one live-in relationship has been registered in Uttarakhand's Uniform Civil Code (UCC) portal in the first 10 days of its implementation. Officials claimed that five applications have been received from live-in couples for the mandatory registration. One has been granted registration while four others are being verified, they said. On 27 January, BJP-ruled Uttarakhand became the first state in Independent India to implement the Uniform Civil Code, which promotes equal laws for every citizen across all religions and standardises personal laws on marriage, divorce and property. On the occasion, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami launched a portal designed for the mandatory online registration of marriages, divorce and live-in relationships. He was the first to register his marriage on the UCC portal. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Vague allegation: Court acquits man of dowry death

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

A Delhi court has acquitted a man in the dowry death case of his wife and said "vague and general" allegations without specific evidence were not sufficient to convict an accused. Additional sessions judge Twinkle Wadhwa was hearing the case against Monish alias Noor Mohammad. According to the prosecution, the wife died by suicide on 9 May last year due to torture meted out to her by the man over dowry. In an order on 31 January, the court said the woman's parents and uncles retracted from their statements on harassment and cruelty by the accused. On the statements of the two neighbours over noises of quarrelling being heard from the accused's house, the court said the duo could not state the reasons for the same. The family members of the deceased, said the court, turned hostile. *—PTI*

Man dupes people of crores with cheap bike promise

KOCHI, 5 FEB

A 26-year-old man has been arrested for his alleged role in duping people across Kerala to the tune of several crores by promising them scooters, sewing machines, home appliances and laptops at half price, police here said on Wednesday. According to a senior police officer in Muvattupuzha here, the accused -- Anandu Krishnan -- has been promising to provide the two-wheeler, home appliances, etc at half price using the CSR funds of big companies since 2022. Giving details of his modus operandi, the officer said that the accused had formed a society called Muvattupuzha Socio-Economic Development Society and urged its members to deposit money in a consultancy he had set up, saying that he could provide them two-wheelers at half price. *—PTI*

US plane brings back 104 Indians; 48 illegal migrants below age of 25

Congress claims Indians were handcuffed, humiliated while being deported

AMRITSAR, 5 FEB

A US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal Indian immigrants landed at the Shri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport here on Wednesday afternoon, sources said.

While 30 of the deportees are from Punjab, 33 each are from Haryana and Gujarat, three each from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and two from Chandigarh, the sources said.

An official confirmation on the number of deportees is awaited.

The deportees include 25 women and 12 minors, with the youngest passenger being just four years old.

Forty-eight people are below the age of 25. The flight, which took off from Texas on Tuesday, also carried 11 crew members and 45 US officials overseeing the deportation process.

Earlier reports claimed that US military plane C-17 was bringing back 205 illegal immigrants.

A US military aircraft carrying illegal Indian immigrants upon its landing at the Shri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport in Amritsar on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, Congress on Wednesday expressed sadness over "pictures of Indians getting handcuffed and humiliated" while being deported from the US and recalled that America had to express regret over the treatment meted out to India diplomat Devyani Khobragade in 2013 after the then UPA government retaliated sharply.

"I remember in December of 2013, an Indian diplomat Devyani Khobragade was handcuffed and strip searched in America. Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh registered a strong protest with US Ambassador Nancy Powell," Pawan Khera said in a post on X. The flight landed at 1.55 pm. There was heavy barricading outside the airport and police personnel were deployed in large numbers.

This is the first batch of illegal Indian immigrants to have been deported by the US government. According to the sources, the deportees are expected to be allowed to go home following verification and background checks. Police will focus on identifying any deportee with a criminal record, the sources said. Punjab NRI Affairs Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal on Tuesday expressed disappointment over the US government's decision and said these individuals, who contributed to that country's economy, should have been granted permanent residency instead of being deported. *—PTI*

SC collegium approves judges' appointments

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Supreme Court collegium on Wednesday approved the proposal for appointment of five additional judges of the high courts of Madras and Telangana as permanent judges. The collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna, held its meeting on Wednesday. "The Supreme Court collegium in its meeting held on 5 February, 2025 has approved the proposal for appointment of the following additional judges as permanent judges in the Madras High Court -- Justice Venkatachari Lakshminarayanan and Justice Periyasamy Vadamalai," read the collegium statement. *—PTI*

More than 50 were undergoing treatment at the hospital and the rest were discharged **PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE**

250 ill due to food poisoning in M'rashtra

KOLHAPUR, 5 FEB

More than 250 people fell ill due to suspected food poisoning after attending a village fair in western Maharashtra's Kolhapur district, police said on Wednesday.

About 50 persons were undergoing treatment at hospital at Shirol at present and the condition of all of them was said to be stable, said an official of Kurundwad police station.

A fair had been organised at Shivnakwadi village on Tuesday where `kheer', a sweet preparation made from milk, was served as `prasad', he said.

"People started complaining of diarrhoea, nausea and fever since today morning. So far, 255 people have fallen sick due to suspected food poisoning. Most of them are claiming that they had `kheer' at the fair. But there were food stalls too," the police official said.

More than 50 p were undergoing treatment at the hospital and the rest were discharged, he said, adding that all the admitted patients were stable.

"Food samples from the fair have been sent to the forensic laboratory to ascertain if it was food poisoning," said the official. *—PTI*

4 LAKH CHICKENS DIE IN ANDHRA IN JUST 45 DAYS

AMARAVATI, 5 FEB

Nearly four lakh chickens perished in West Godavari of Andhra Pradesh and vicinity over the past 45 days, prompting the Animal Husbandry Department to send samples for testing to ascertain the cause, said an official on Wednesday.

Animal Husbandry Department director Damodar Naidu said samples were sent to a high security lab in Bhopal and also Vijayawada for confirming the disease causing these deaths.

"There is mortality but not to the extent claimed by the farmers. Farmers are also neglecting biosecurity measures, which is the main reason for the spread of diseases," Naidu told PTI. Some farmers dumped dead birds in the canals and on garbage dumps in the streets, leading to the spread of the infection, he said, adding that basic precaution was neglected, resulting in the deaths of the fowls. According to the animal husbandry official, usually, this phenomenon is seasonal and manifests every year, however, due to negligence of poultry farmers, number of deaths has gone up. *—PTI*

Water from homes of 26 GBS patients had no chlorine

PUNE, 5 FEB

A water quality survey held around Nanded village, the epicentre of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) in Pune city, has found there was lack of chlorine in the drinking water supplied to households of 26 patients of this nerve disorder, officials said.

GBS is a rare condition that causes sudden numbness and muscle weakness, with symptoms including severe weakness in the limbs.

On Tuesday, three fresh cases of GBS were reported in Maharashtra's Pune city, taking the overall tally to 166, they said.

Officials of the Rapid Response Team (RRT), formed to probe the outbreak of the GBS cases in Nanded and adjoining localities in Sinhagad Road area, said there were 77 GBS patients in Nanded. Of them, the households of 62 patients were visited to take the drinking water samples.

Experts have now urged the Pune Municipal Corporation's (PMC) water supply department to take immediate action to maintain chlorine level of 0.2 ppm (parts per million) in the household water supply to ensure public health safety.

"While water at the source (well) was found to be adequately purified with sufficient chlorine levels, zero chlorine was detected in households of 26 patients out of 62," an RRT member said.

Some of the private water ATMs were seized after E coli was found in their samples **PHOTO: PTI**

Last week, Maharashtra Health Minister Prakash Abitkar said 80 per cent of the suspected GBS cases in Pune have been reported from areas located around a mega well in Nanded.

Some of the private water ATMs were seized after E coli was found in their samples, he added. *—PTI*

Woman jumps from 1st floor to escape sexual assault in Kerala

KOZHIKODE, 5 FEB

A hotelier, who had been absconding after a woman employee jumped from the first floor of a building here while resisting his alleged sexual assault attempt, was held from Thrissur, police said on Wednesday.

The accused, Devadas, was nabbed by the Mukkam police from Kunnamkulam during a bus journey on Tuesday night.

According to police, Devadas, who runs a moderate hotel in the district, was accused of barging into the room of a woman employee at her rented house here on Saturday.

His accomplices, Riyas and Suresh, who were also with him, remain at large.

Hailing from Payyannur in Kannur, the victim had joined the hotel a few months ago **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

The shocking incident came to light after the woman, who sustained serious injuries from jumping from the first floor of the building to escape the assault, shared her harrowing experience with the police. Hailing from Payyannur in Kannur, the victim had joined the hotel owned by Devadas a few months ago. She gave the statement that the trio barged into her room when she was watching a video game on her phone, and she had no other way but to jump down the building to escape the assault.

After hearing her cries, neighbours and local people rushed to the spot and soon shifted her to a nearby hospital. *—PTI*

1992 fake encounter: 2 Punjab cops get lifer

CHANDIGARH, 6 FEB

A court in Mohali awarded life imprisonment to two former Punjab police officers for killing two people in a 1992 fake encounter in Amritsar.

The court convicted former station house officer (SHO) Gurbhinder Singh and former assistant sub-inspector Parshotam Singh for killing Baldev Singh and Lakhwinder Singh in the fake encounter.

After the encounter, police had claimed that Baldev and Lakhwinder were hardcore terrorists with bounties on their heads and were involved in several cases of murder, extortion and dacoity, including the killing of Harbhajan Singh, the son of Gurmej Singh, the then cabinet minister in the Beant Singh government. During the investigation, it came to light that Baldev, who was Lance Naik in the Army, and was on leave at the time of the incident, was picked up from his house on 6 September, 1992. Lakhwinder was picked up on 12 September, 1992. The CBI found that Baldev and Lakhwinder were falsely implicated in the case. *—PTI*

TRAIN DERAILS IN ODISHA, NEARS RESIDENTIAL COLONY

ROURKELA, 5 FEB

Three wagons of a goods train jumped the tracks near Rourkela railway station in Odisha's Sundargarh district on Wednesday, officials said.

No casualties have been reported so far, they said.

After jumping the tracks the three wagons moved close to houses of people near the railway tracks in Malgodown slum, they said.

"We ran away from our houses after as the wagons moved towards our colony," a slum dweller said.

Traffic on the Railway Gate-Basanti Colony road has been disrupted due to the accident. *—PTI*

IN M'RASHTRA

Labourers can now register themselves online

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Construction workers in Maharashtra can now register themselves online but will have to visit a district or taluka facilitation centre for biometric and document verification, a state minister said on Wednesday.

To support this initiative, 366 taluk facilitation centres have been established across the state and the service officially commenced from Wednesday, Labour Minister Akash Pandurang Fundkar said.

Integrated Welfare Board Management System (IWBMS), an online system, facilitates registration, renewal as well as distribution of benefits for construction workers. Previously, these services were handled at the district-level Building and Other Construction Workers Facilitation Centres, he said.

"After the new notification issued by the central government, the state has now established 366 taluk centres, each capable of processing up to 150 applications per day," he said.

Since the launch of these centres on 8 November last year, a total of 5,12,581 applications have been processed online, he said.

Overcrowding at some centres generally leads to long waiting time and loss of daily wages for workers. To address these issues and enhance convenience, efficiency and transparency, revised instructions have been issued, he said.

"If a worker faces delay in getting an appointment at the district facilitation centre for benefit distribution applications, he will be given an earlier date at the nearest taluka centre," Fundkar said. Apart from that, taluka-level facilitation centres will be expanded in those districts that report high demand. In each district centre, three out of five staff members will serve as entry operators, while the remaining two will handle data entry and modification requests for workers, the minister said. *—PTI*

Overcrowding at some centres generally leads to long waiting time and loss of daily wages for workers **PHOTO: PTI**

HC orders status quo on Rohit Bal's estate

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Delhi High Court has ordered a status quo on the estate of late fashion designer Rohit Bal.

Justice Anish Dayal on 4 February ordered a status quo on a plea of his friend Lalit Tehlan who claimed of being the primary beneficiary of Bal's duly executed will with respect to his assets, including properties in Defence Colony and Noida besides the shareholding in Rohit Bal Designs Pvt Ltd.

Bal, a pioneer who helped put Indian fashion on the global map and dressed celebrities back home, Hollywood and elsewhere, died on November 1, 2024 night in a south Delhi hospital following a heart attack. He was 63.

In the application, Tehlan sought an injunction order against Bal's step-brothers in order to ensure the designer's properties were preserved.

PHOTO: ANI

Tehlan said Bal mentioned in his will dated 30 October, 2023, that his legal heirs including his brothers, Rakesh Bal and Rajiv Bal, and his step sisters, Neera and Late Aruna and their legal heirs, or any other relative should have no rights over his properties, both movable and immovable, after his death. However, to Tehlan's shock and surprise, the locks to the Defence Colony premises were changed by the decedent's stepbrother, the plea alleged. *—PTI*

SPRING BLOOMS DECORATE CITY

Colourful blooms seen in Bengaluru's Cubbon Park. The City is known for its vibrant spring owing to a rich cultivation of species. ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Gaza, which just saw peace, is threatened again

President Donald Trump's suggestion Tuesday that displaced Palestinians in Gaza be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory and the US take "ownership" may spark new tension over the enclave on the Mediterranean Sea. Here's a look at the troubled modern history of the Gaza Strip:

Palestinians walk past a mosque destroyed by Israeli airstrikes in Nuseirat, Gaza Strip, on 24 Jan, 2025 days after a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas came into effect ***PHOTO: PTI***

1948-1967: Egyptian rule

Before the war surrounding Israel's establishment in 1948, present-day Gaza was part of the large swath of the Middle East under British colonial rule. After Israel defeated the coalition of Arab states, the Egyptian army was left in control of a small strip of land wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean.

During the war, some 700,000 Palestinians either fled or were forced from their homes in what is now Israel — a mass uprooting that they call the Nakba, or "catastrophe." Tens of thousands of Palestinians flocked to the strip.

Under Egyptian military control, Palestinian refugees in Gaza were stuck, homeless and stateless. Egypt didn't consider them to be citizens and Israel wouldn't let them return to their homes. Many were supported by UNWRA, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, which has a heavy presence in Gaza to this day.

1967-1993: Israel rule

Israel seized control of Gaza from Egypt during the 1967 Mideast war, when it also captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem — areas that remain under Israeli control. The internationally recognised Palestinian Authority, which administers semi-autonomous areas of the occupied West Bank, sought all three areas for a state. Israel built more than 20 Jewish settlements in Gaza during this period.

The first Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation erupted in Gaza in December 1987, kicked off more than five years of sustained protests and bloody violence. It was also during this time that the Islamic militant group Hamas was established in Gaza.

1993-2005: The Palestinian Authority takes charge

For a time, promising peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders made the future of Gaza look somewhat hopeful.

Following the Oslo accords — a set of agreements between the Israeli Prime Minister and Palestinian Liberation Organisation leader that laid the groundwork for a two-state solution control of Gaza was handed to the Palestinian Authority.

But the optimism was short lived. A series of Palestinian suicide attacks by Hamas militants, the 1995 assassination of Rabin by a Jewish ultranationalist opposed to his peacemaking and the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister the following year all hindered US-led peace efforts.

2005-2023: Hamas' rise

Hamas won parliamentary elections over Fatah, the long-dominant party in 2006. The following year, after months of infighting, Hamas violently seized control of Gaza from the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority.

Israel and Egypt imposed a crippling blockade on the territory, monitoring the flow of goods and people in and out. For nearly two decades, the closure has crippled the local economy, sent unemployment skyrocketing, and emboldened militancy in the region, which is one of the most densely populated places on the planet.

The group has displayed a growing array of weapons. In each subsequent conflict, Hamas had more rockets that traveled farther.

It built a government, including a police force, ministries and border terminals equipped with metal detectors and passport control.

2023: Israel-Hamas war

On 7 October, 2023, Hamas attack killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and saw around 250 people taken hostage. Israel's air and ground war has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children. The war has left large parts of several cities in ruins and displaced around 90 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people. Under the first phase of the ceasefire, which went into effect on 19 Jan, Hamas released 33 hostages in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces have pulled back from most areas and allowed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to return to northern Gaza while aid flows in. Negotiations on the second phase, which would end the war and see the remaining 60 or so hostages returned. If the mediators the are unable to broker an agreement between Israel and Hamas, the war could resume in March. *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

OpenAI vs DeepSeek and their copyright battles

Until recently, few people had heard of a small Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) company DeepSeek. But on 20 January, it captured global attention when it released a new AI model called R1.

R1 is a "reasoning" model, meaning it works through tasks step by step and details its working process to a user. It is a more advanced version of DeepSeek's V3 model, which released in December. DeepSeek's new offering is almost as powerful as OpenAI's most advanced AI model o1, but at a fraction of the cost.

Within days, DeepSeek's app surpassed ChatGPT in new downloads, set stock prices of tech companies in the United States tumbling and led OpenAI to claim that its Chinese rival had effectively pilfered some of the crown jewels from OpenAI's models to build its own.

In a statement to the New York Times, the company said, "We are aware of and reviewing indications that DeepSeek may have inappropriately distilled our models, and will share information as we know more. We take aggressive, proactive countermeasures to protect our technology and will continue working closely with the US government to protect the most capable models being built here."

But even if DeepSeek distilled some of ChatGPT to build R1, it's worth remembering that OpenAI also stands accused of disrespecting intellectual property while developing its models.

Model distillation is a common machine learning technique in which a smaller "student model" is trained on predictions of a larger and more complex "teacher model." When completed, the student may be nearly as good as the teacher but will represent the teacher's knowledge more effectively and compactly.

- There are reasons to be sceptical of some of the company's marketing hype – for example, a new independent report suggests the hardware spend on R1 was as high as USD 500 million. But even so, DeepSeek was still built very quickly and efficiently compared with rival models.

To do so, it is not necessary to access the inner workings of the teacher. All one needs to pull off this trick is to ask the teacher model enough questions to train the student.

This is what OpenAI claims DeepSeek has done: queried OpenAI's o1 at a massive scale and used the observed outputs to train DeepSeek's own, more efficient models. DeepSeek claims that both the training and usage of R1 required only a fraction of the resources needed to develop their competitors' best models.

There are reasons to be sceptical of some of the company's marketing hype – for example, a new independent report suggests the hardware spend on R1 was as high as USD 500 million. But even so, DeepSeek was still built very quickly and efficiently compared with rival models.

This might be because DeepSeek distilled OpenAI's output but there is currently no method to prove this conclusively.

The technical advances made by DeepSeek included taking advantage of less powerful but cheaper AI chips. DeepSeek had no choice but to adapt after the US has banned firms from exporting the most powerful AI chips to China which forced Chinese companies to make the best use of cheaper alternatives.

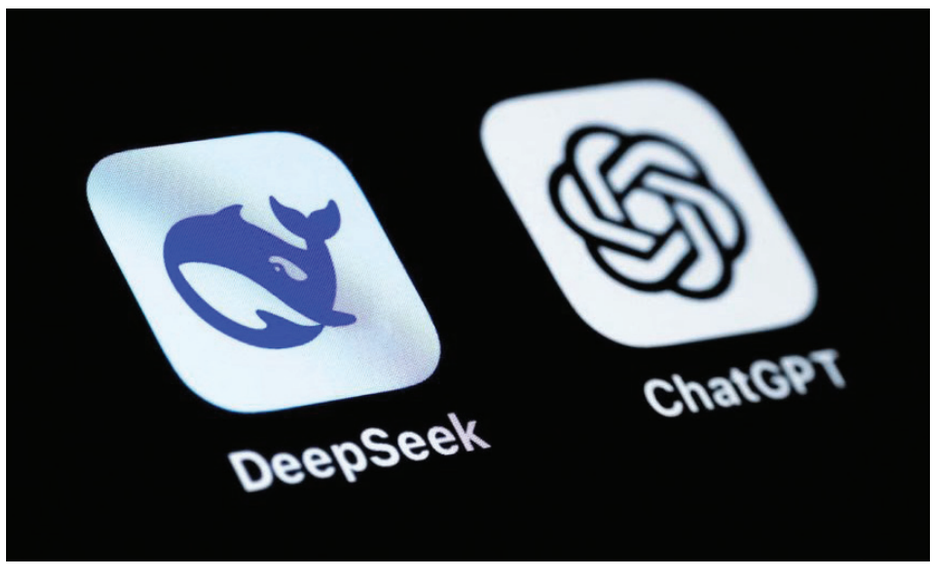
OpenAI's terms of use explicitly state nobody may use its AI models to develop competing products. However, its own models are trained on massive datasets scraped from the web. These datasets contained a substantial amount of copyrighted material, which OpenAI says it is entitled to use on the basis of "fair use":

Training AI models using publicly available internet materials is allegedly fair use, as supported by long-standing and widely accepted precedents. But this argument will be tested in court, as newspapers, musicians, authors and other creatives have filed a series of lawsuits against OpenAI on the grounds of copyright infringement.

The war of lawsuits is an artefact of how the rapid advance of AI has outpaced the development of clear legal rules for the industry. While these recent events might reduce the power of AI incumbents, much hinges on the outcome of the ongoing legal disputes.

Over the weekend, OpenAI attempted to demonstrate its supremacy by publicly releasing its most advanced consumer model, o3-mini. OpenAI claims this model substantially outperforms even its own previous market-leading version, o1, and is the "most cost-efficient model in our reasoning series."

DeepSeek's rise certainly marks new territory for building models more cheaply and efficiently. Perhaps it will also shake up the global conversation on how AI companies should collect and use their training data. *—PTI*



Within days, DeepSeek's app surpassed ChatGPT in new downloads ***PHOTO: X***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Aga Khan IV: India's friend who made the world a better place

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

One of the greatest patrons of built heritage and the man behind the revival of decaying sites like Sunder Nursery and Humayun's Tomb, is how experts remembered Aga Khan IV, who died in Lisbon on Wednesday at the age of 88.

Aga Khan IV, a spiritual leader of the Ismaili Shia Muslim community, was known for his development work around the world, including India.

He was given the title of "His Highness" by Queen Elizabeth in July 1957, two weeks after his grandfather the Aga Khan III unexpectedly made him heir to the family's 1,300-year dynasty as leader of the Ismaili Muslim sect.

The spiritual leader, who over the decades turned into a business magnate, became famed for building homes, hospitals and schools in developing countries.

His interests, however, extended to preserving and revival of cultural heritage across countries, including India, through the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) -- a part of his main philanthropic organisation Aga Khan Development Network.

Under the trust's patronage, India saw the restoration of the 16th-century Humayun Tomb, a UNESCO world heritage site in Delhi, and the conservation of Sunder Nursery and the Qutb Shahi monuments in Hyderabad.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prince Karim Aga Khan IV during a meeting in New Delhi in 2015 ***PHOTO: PTI***

The then president Pranab Mukherjee confers the Padma Vibhushan award on Prince Karim Aga Khan IV on 8 April, 2015 ***PHOTO: PTI***

"Until a few years ago no one in India knew that something like Sunder Nursery existed. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture has made a lot of such places accessible to people. So, yes, his Trust intervention has been quite beneficial to people. And the work of Aga Khan IV has been a very positive influence in India, especially in the field of built heritage," historian Irfan Habib told PTI.

The AKTC currently works in 30 countries and employs almost one lakh people.

The trust's India CEO Ratish Nanda, who has worked with the institute for almost three decades, described Aga Khan as an "incredible visionary" for whom the built heritage had always been a passion.

"He always believed the built heritage restoration can lead to overall improvement in the quality of life for historic communities and fulfil government's objectives. He really set the bar very very high. I don't think the world will ever see a patron like in built heritage. It is really the end of an era," Nanda said.

According to him, Aga Khan IV, who held citizenship in Canada, Britain, and Portugal, always had a special place for India in his heart.

- The spiritual leader, who over the decades turned into a business magnate, became famed for building homes, hospitals and schools in developing countries.His interests, however, extended to preserving and revival of cultural heritage across countries

This love, he added, could be gauged from the "gifts" he gave to the country on its 25th (Aga Khan Palace), 50th (restoration of Humayun Tomb gardens) and most recently on 75th birth anniversary (India's first sunken museum at Humayun Tomb).

Built in 1892 by Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III in Pune, the Aga Khan Palace, which was the site of imprisonment for Mahatma Gandhi, his wife Kasturba Gandhi, and other leaders during the freedom struggle, was donated to India by the Padma Vibhushan awardee.

The palace currently houses Gandhi's memorial, and samadhis of Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai, his secretary, and archives of photos and portraits of Gandhi during the freedom struggle.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences on his death and described him as a visionary who dedicated his life to service and spirituality.

"Deeply saddened by the passing of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV. He was a visionary, who dedicated his life to service and spirituality. His contributions in areas like health, education, rural development and women empowerment will continue to inspire several people," Modi said on X.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, and Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy also expressed their grief at his death.

He is survived by three sons and a daughter and several grandchildren. His successor has been designated in his will, which will be read in the presence of his family and religious leaders in Lisbon before the name is made public.

The successor is chosen from among his male progeny or other relatives, according to the Ismaili community's website. *—PTI*

US allies reject Trump's Gaza 'take over' plan

Egypt, Jordan, other US allies are against relocating over 2M Palestinians from Gaza

DUBAI, 5 FEB

President Donald Trump's proposal that the United States "takeover" the Gaza Strip and permanently resettle its Palestinian residents was swiftly rejected and denounced on Wednesday by American allies and adversaries alike.

Trump's suggestion came at a White House news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who smiled several times as the president detailed a plan to build new settlements for Palestinians outside the Gaza Strip, and for the US to take "ownership" in redeveloping the war-torn territory into "the Riviera of the Middle East."

"We'll own it (the Gaza Strip) and be responsible for dismantling all of the dangerous unexploded bombs and other weapons on the site, level the site, and get rid of the destroyed buildings, level it out and create an economic development that will supply unlimited numbers of jobs," Trump said.

The comments came amid a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, during which the militant group has been turning over hostages in exchange for the release of prisoners held by Israel.

- Trump's suggestion came at a press meet with Benjamin Netanyahu, who smiled several times as the US President detailed a plan to build new settlements for Palestinians outside the Gaza Strip, and for the US to take "ownership" in redeveloping the territory

Egypt, Jordan and other American allies in the Middle East have already rejected the idea of relocating more than 2 million Palestinians from Gaza elsewhere in the region.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in Canberra that his country has long supported a two-state solution in the Middle East and that nothing had changed. Trump has already made waves – and upset longtime allies – suggesting the purchase of Greenland, the annexation of Canada and the possible takeover of the Panama Canal. It was not immediately clear whether the idea of taking over the Gaza Strip was a well thought out plan, or an opening gambit in negotiations. *—PTI*

President Donald Trump meets with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in the White House **PHOTO: PTI**

LEFT INSTRUCTIONS TO 'OBLITERATE' IRAN IF IT ASSASSINATES ME: TRUMP

WASHINGTON, 5 FEB

US President Donald Trump has said he has left instruction to "obliterate" Iran if he is assassinated by the regime. The US has charged Iran with trying to assassinate Trump.

Last year, the Department of Justice indicted many persons for trying to assassinate Trump on behalf of Iran. One of them was quoted as saying that Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps was behind the plot.

Meanwhile, Iran's rial plunged on Wednesday to a record low of 850,000 to the US dollar after US President Donald Trump signed an order to restart the "maximum pressure" campaign targeting Tehran.

The order seeks halting of Iran's oil exports and pursuing a "snapback" of UN sanctions on Iran. At stake are potentially billions of dollars withheld from Iran through sanctions on enriching uranium. *—Agencies*

Saudi stands firm on a free Palestinian state

DUBAI, 5 FEB

In response to US President Donald Trump's suggestion of the US taking over the Gaza Strip, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry in Wednesday issued a sharply worded statement that their long call for an independent Palestinian state was a "firm, steadfast and unwavering position."

It said Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the country's de-facto ruler as saying: "Saudi Arabia will not stop its tireless work towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital, and that the kingdom will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without that."

The ministry added: "This firm position is not subject to negotiation or outbidding." *—PTI*

CIA offers buyouts to entire workforce

WASHINGTON, 5 FEB

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) offered buyouts to its entire workforce on Tuesday, citing an aim to bring the agency in line with Donald Trump's priorities, the media reported. The agency is also freezing the hiring of job applicants already given a conditional offer, the WSJ reported, quoting CIA director John Ratcliffe's aide.

The aide, not named in the report, said some of those frozen offers were likely to be rescinded if the applicants did not have the right background for the agency's new goals, which include targeting drug cartels, Trump's trade war and undermining China.

Meanwhile, more than 20,000 federal employees have signed up for a resignation offer that would allow them receive taxpayer-funded salaries until the end of September, reported Bloomberg. *—Agencies*

Trump signs exit from UNHRC, freezes funds

The US President has signed an executive order withdrawing the US from the UN Human Rights Council, prohibiting any future funding for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

He also ordered review of its participation in the UNESCO, the body that uses culture and history as a bridge-building mechanism between nations. *—PTI*

US contribution to fight gangs in Haiti ends

The US has notified the UN that it is freezing funding to a mission in Haiti for fighting gangs trying to seize full control of the country's capital, the UN said Tuesday.

The US has been the biggest contributor to the mission led by Kenyan police, which was launched last year and is struggling with a lack of funding and personnel. *—PTI*

Trump to sign sports curbs on transgenders

President Donald Trump is all set to sign an executive order on Wednesday designed to prevent people who were biologically assigned male at birth from participating in women's or girls' sporting events. The order marks another aggressive step by the US president's second administration on transgender people and their rights. *—PTI*

Protests against Trump come alive online

A movement to oppose the early actions of President Donald Trump's administration is taking off online, with plans of protests across the US on Wednesday. The movement has organised under the hashtags #buildtheresistance and #50501 –50 protests, 50 states, one day. Many of the protests are planned at state capitols. *—PTI*

US Postal Service halts parcels from China

The US Postal Service (USPS) said it was temporarily suspending inbound parcels from China and Hong Kong, shortly after President Donald Trump's imposition of fresh tariffs targeting Beijing.

The order, unveiled over the weekend, also eliminated a duty-free exemption for low value packages. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

S'pore jails rapper of Indian-origin for spreading hate

SINGAPORE, 5 FEB

Indian-origin Rapper Subhas Nair on Wednesday began his six-week jail term for attempting to promote ill will among racial and religious groups through online posts in multi-ethnic Singapore. The 32-year-old Singaporean, whose full name is Subhas Govin Prabhakar Nair, appealed against his conviction and sentence before Justice Hoo Sheau Peng over two days starting last year. The High Court had dismissed his appeals, the Channel News Asia reported. For attempting to promote feelings of ill will between racial or religious groups, Nair could have been jailed up to three years, fined or both. Justice Hoo said she agreed with the lower court's decision on conviction and sentence. *—PTI*

Shooting at Ohio warehouse kills 1, injures 5

NEW ALBANY, 5 FEB

A shooting on Tuesday night at the warehouse of a company in Ohio killed one person and wounded five others, officials said. The victims have been transported to hospitals and the suspect is no longer believed to be at the building, said Josh Poland, a spokesperson for the city of New Albany. New Albany Police Chief Greg Jones described the shooting just before 11 pm as a "targeted type of attack" and said officials don't believe the suspect poses a general threat to the public. Police did not provide a motive for the shooting. *—PTI*

French govt likely to survive no-confidence motion

PARIS, 5 FEB

The head of France's far-right National Rally party on Tuesday said he doesn't support a no-confidence motion filed against the government, making it more likely that the prime minister will remain in office and a 2025 budget will be adopted.

A no-confidence vote is scheduled Wednesday in the National Assembly and needs at least half the 577 votes to pass. Hard-left France Unbowed, Communist and Green lawmakers are expected to vote in favour but don't have the numbers on their own to bring down the centrist government.

Jordan Bardella, president of the National Rally, the biggest group in the National Assembly, said "in the current period, the French ... would not benefit from a new period of instability."

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

- Hard-left France Unbowed, Communist and Green lawmakers are expected to vote in favour but don't have the numbers on their own to bring down the centrist government

The leftist Socialist party said earlier it wouldn't back the no-confidence motion because "it's time to give France a budget."

On Monday, Prime Minister François Bayrou used special constitutional powers to get the 2025 budget approved without a vote by lawmakers.

Under France's Constitution, the budget will automatically be considered as adopted if the no-confidence motion fails.

In December, a similar no-confidence motion triggered by budget disputes forced Prime Minister Michel Barnier to resign after only three months in office.

This time, Bayrou sought more stability for his minority government through intense negotiations with the Socialists aimed at reaching a non-aggression deal.

Bayrou agreed to provide more money for public hospitals and committed not to cut 4,000 jobs in national education. He also said last month that he was open to renegotiating a contested plan raising the retirement age from 62 to 64. *—PTI*

'WON'T BE KIND TO HIM'

Zelenskyy says he's ready to sit with Putin in peace talks

KYIV, 5 FEB

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is ready to sit at the negotiating table with Russian President Vladimir Putin if it is the only setup that will bring peace to Ukraine, the president told UK journalist Piers Morgan in an interview.

US President Donald Trump has urged Zelenskyy and Putin to "make a deal" to end the war and has pledged to broker a ceasefire within the first six months of his term.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine was ready to end the "hot stage" of the war and that its willingness to negotiate with Russia at all represented a compromise.

"We will be speaking with Putin. ... Even the conversation with Putin is a compromise," Zelenskyy told Morgan.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

When asked how he would feel sitting opposite Putin in an in-person meeting, Zelensky dismissed his personal sentiments on the matter.

"If that is the only setup in which we can bring peace to the citizens of Ukraine and not lose people, definitely, we will go for this setup ... What does it matter, my attitude to him?" Zelensky said.

"I will not be kind to him, I consider him an enemy. And to be honest, I believe he considers me an enemy as well."

Zelenskyy reiterated that the negotiaton process should include Ukraine, the United States, the European Union, and Russia. He also said that Kyiv was not willing to acknowledge any occupied Ukrainian lands as Russian territory. *—Kyiv Independent*

SUCCESSOR TO BE CHOSEN

Aga Khan balanced spiritual with worldy

PARIS, 5 FEB

Condolences poured in online for spiritual leader of the world's millions of Ismaili Muslims Aga Khan from charity groups he supported, as well as the equestrian world, where he was a well-known figure.

Ceremonies were being held Tuesday in Ismaili communities in the US and others were held elsewhere in the world Wednesday.

The Aga Khan was given the title of "His Highness" by Queen Elizabeth in July 1957, two weeks after his grandfather the Aga Khan III unexpectedly made him heir to the family's 1,300-year dynasty as leader of the Ismaili Muslim sect.

Considered by his followers to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and treated as a head of state, he was a student when his grandfather named him as successor to lead the diaspora of Shia Ismaili Muslims, passing over his playboy father and saying his followers should be led by a young man "who has been brought up in the midst of the new age."

Aga Khan's successor is designated in his will, which will be read in the presence of his family and religious leaders in Lisbon **PHOTO: X**

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called him "a symbol of peace, tolerance and compassion in our troubled world." Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called him a very good friend and "an extraordinarily compassionate global leader." The Aga Khan was given the title of "His Highness" by Queen Elizabeth in July 1957, two weeks after his grandfather the Aga Khan III unexpectedly made him heir to the family's 1,300-year dynasty as leader of the Ismaili Muslim sect.

The extent of the Aga Khan's financial empire is hard to measure. Some reports estimated his personal wealth to be in the billions.

His successor was designated in his will, which will be read in the presence of his family and religious leaders in Lisbon before revealing the name. The successor is chosen from among his male progeny or other relatives, according to the Ismaili community's website. *—PTI*

Philippines impeaches VP post feud with Prez

MANILA, 5 FEB

Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte was impeached by the House of Representatives on Wednesday after more than the required number of legislators, many of them allies of the president with whom she has had a bitter political feud, signed a petition to remove her from office.

House of Representatives Secretary General Reginald Velasco told a plenary meeting of the lower chamber of Congress that at least 215 lawmakers have signed a petition to impeach Duterte, more than enough for the powerful House to impeach her.

With enough endorsements by House legislators, the impeachment complaint was ordered transmitted to the Senate, which will serve as an impeachment tribunal that would try the vice president, the daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

The Vice President, regarded as a possible presidential candidate after Marcos's term ends in 2028, has faced at least four impeachment complaints by several legislators and left-wing activist groups over a range of issues.

Those included a death threat she made against the president, his wife and House Speaker Martin Romualdez last year and irregularities in the use of her office's intelligence funds. *—PTI*

India our 2nd largest mkt, should lead in AI: Sam Altman

Altman's 2nd visit comes as DeepSeek challenges OpenAI

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman on Wednesday said that the country is important for Artificial Intelligence and OpenAI, and added that India - with its full stack model - should be among the leaders of the AI revolution.

Altman, during a fireside chat with IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, said OpenAI tripled its users here in the last year. He gave a ringing endorsement to India's efforts in building on AI at all levels of the stack, chips, models and "the incredible applications".

"India is an incredibly important market for AI in general, for open AI in particular, it's our second biggest market. Tripled users here in the last year, but mostly seeing what people in India are building with AI at all levels of the stack, chips, models, you know, all of the incredible applications," Altman, who is on a whirlwind India tour, said. Altman advocated India to go all out in its AI play. "I think India should be one of the leaders of the AI revolution. But it's really quite amazing to see what the country has done... embraced the technology and is building the entire stack of things on top of it," Altman said.

During the fireside chat on Wednesday, IT Minister Vaishnaw said that innovation can come from anywhere in the world "why shouldn't it come from India".

Altman's visit, his second one in two years, comes at an interesting juncture when OpenAI's (and indeed the western world's) dominance in artificial intelligence has abruptly been challenged by Chinese upstart DeepSeek, which turned heads with its low-cost AI model R1, built at less than USD 6 million and guzzling a fraction of compute power when compared to popular models like ChatGPT.

Deepseek overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's App Store, as the US tech industry -- that has long-justified injecting billions of dollars into AI investments -- watched in sheer disbelief last week.

AI chipmaker and Wall Street superstar Nvidia shed USD 590 billion in market capitalisation last Monday, suffering the single greatest one-day value wipeout of any firm in history.

Ahead of Altman's visit, a 2023 video of him -- where he had expressed doubts about powerful AI models emerging outside of the United States -- has also resurfaced. *—PTI*

Union Minister of Information & Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman during a meeting, in New Delhi **PHOTO: X**

Ola Electric forays into e-bike with Roadster X

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Ola Electric on Wednesday said it has forayed into the electric motorcycle segment with the launch of its Roadster X series. Built on the company's scalable motorcycle platform, the all-new Roadster X series comes with 2.5kWh, 3.5kWh and 4.5kWh variants priced at Rs 74,999, Rs 84,999 and Rs 94,999, respectively. The Roadster X+ 4.5kWh is priced at Rs 1,04,999 and Roadster X+ 9.1kWh (with 4680 Bharat Cell) that offers a range of 501 km per charge is tagged at Rs 1,54,999, the Bengaluru-based company said in a statement. After transforming the scooter market and making EVs mainstream, the company's futuristic Roadster series of motorcycles is here to accelerate the EV adoption further and make electric the first choice for every rider in India, he added. The deliveries for the Roadster series will commence from mid-March onwards, it added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Birla's daughter announces new beauty venture

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Ananya Birla, daughter of billionaire Kumar Mangalam Birla, on Wednesday announced an entry into the fast-growing beauty and cosmetics space with the launch of a new venture. The 30-year-old Birla, who launched a microlending venture at 17 and also sits on the board of the USD 62-billion Aditya Birla Group's apex strategic body, will come out with a range of beauty and personal care brands nationally through 2025, a statement said. The statement said rising disposable incomes, deeper e-commerce penetration and growing openness among consumers are leading India's beauty. Personal care market is expected to grow at 10-11 per cent annually and the sector is expected to be a USD 34 billion opportunity by 2028. *—PTI*

Swiggy's Q3 loss widens to ₹799 crore

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Food and grocery delivery major Swiggy on Wednesday reported widening of consolidated loss to Rs 799.08 crore for the third quarter ended December 2024. The company had incurred a net loss of Rs 574.38 crore in the year-ago period. Total expenses surged to Rs 4,898.27 crore from Rs 3,700 crore in October-December FY24. Revenue from operations also increased to Rs 3,993.06 crore from Rs 3,048.69 crore, a regulatory filing said. Notably, Swiggy's overall Gross Order Value (GOV) grew 38 per cent year-on-year (YoY) to Rs 12,165 crore. Swiggy's quick commerce business Swiggy Instamart reported an 88 per cent YoY (15.5 per cent QoQ) rise in GOV to Rs 3,907 crore. *—PTI*

Zydus Lifesciences Q3 profit rises 30% at ₹ 1,023 crore

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Zydus Lifesciences on Wednesday said consolidated net profit increased by 30 per cent to Rs 1,023 crore for the third quarter ended 31 December, 2024, aided by robust sales across domestic and US markets. The drug firm reported a net profit of Rs 790 crore in the October-December quarter of the previous fiscal. Revenue from operations increased to Rs 5,269 crore in the third quarter as against Rs 4,505 crore in the year-ago period, Zydus Lifesciences said in a statement. Zydus Lifesciences shares were trading 1.79 per cent down at Rs 956 apiece on BSE *—PTI*

75+ industry icons to speak at Invest K'taka

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Business tycoons Anand Mahindra, Kumar Mangalam Birla and Sajjan Jindal besides a host of policy makers, thought leaders and new economy stalwarts are among the 75+ speakers lined up for this year's Invest Karnataka event.

Large and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil, under whose leadership Karnataka is setting new benchmarks for industrial growth, announced on Wednesday that the state is set to host its most ambitious global investors meet (GIM), Invest Karnataka 2025.

With the theme 'Reimagining Growth', Invest Karnataka 2025 will focus on technology-driven, sustainable, and inclusive development, reinforcing Karnataka's position as a premier global investment hub.

The event will feature an unparalleled lineup of visionary leaders from diverse fields, who are shaping the future of business, finance, and innovation.

Those expected at the event include Mahindra & Mahindra head Anand Mahindra, Aditya Birla Group chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla, JSW Group managing director Sajjan Jindal, Kirloskar System chairman and managing director Geetanjali Kirloskar, and Volvo Group president & CEO Martin Lundstedt.

A special Future of Innovation Expo will showcase cutting-edge advancements in mobility, defense, biotech, R&D, and precision manufacturing.

Karnataka's forward-looking New Industrial Policy (2024-29), launched under Patil's leadership, will highlight incentives for businesses, focusing on EVs, semiconductors, aerospace, and sustainability, along with key green initiatives like Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) and renewable energy adoption. *—PTI*

NIFTY DROPS 42.95 POINTS

Sensex drops 300 pts ahead of RBI's monetary decision

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower in a volatile session on Wednesday as investors turned cautious ahead of the RBI's monetary policy decision later this week and trade war concerns.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 312.53 points or 0.40 per cent to settle at 78,271.28. During the day, it went lower by 367.56 points or 0.46 per cent to 78,216.25.

The NSE Nifty dropped 42.95 points or 0.18 per cent to 23,696.30.

From the 30-share Sensex pack, Asian Paints dropped over 3 per cent after the firm reported a 23.5 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 1,128.43 crore for the third quarter ended December 2024 amid downtrading due to muted demand and weak festive season.

Titan, Nestle, Hindustan Unilever, State Bank of India, Larsen & Toubro, ITC, Zomato and Bajaj Finserv were also among the laggards.

Adani Ports, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors and HDFC Bank were among the major gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets quoting in the negative zone. US markets ended higher on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Tuesday after unabated selling for the past many days. *—PTI*

NSE CLEARING FACES ₹176.65 CR SHORTFALL

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

NSE Clearing Ltd, the clearing house of the National Stock Exchange (NSE), has failed to meet the capital markets regulator Sebi's mandated liquidity requirements, citing the non-payment of dues by rival BSE as the primary reason for the shortfall.

In its December 2024 quarterly results, NSE Clearing, the exchange's unit responsible for clearing and settling its trades, reported a shortfall of Rs 176.65 crore in its minimum liquid assets.

The company informed Sebi in a letter dated January 9 that this deficit was primarily due to the non-receipt of Rs 312.37 crore in dues from BSE.

An NSE Clearing spokesperson said its auditors flagged the outstanding payment issue in their third-quarter financial review.

The outstanding amount pertains to "interoperability arrangements", the official said.

This allows trading members to clear trades through a clearing firm of their choice rather than being restricted to the clearing corporation affiliated with the exchange where the trade was executed. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

AMID TRADE WAR

Rupee falls 39 to close at all-time low of 87.46

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

The rupee plunged 39 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.46 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as global trade war concerns fuelled risk aversion among investors.

Forex traders said the rupee is trading with a negative bias over global trade war as market participants mulled the impact of tariffs being imposed by the United States and China.

Moreover, rate cut concerns by the Reserve Bank of India and broad strength of the American currency in the overseas market dented investor sentiments further.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 87.13 and touched an intraday low of 87.49 against the American currency during the session.

The local unit finally settled at a record closing low of 87.46 (provisional), lower by 39 paise over its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee recovered 4 paise from its all-time low level to close at 87.07 against US dollar.

Trump is pressing ahead with a 10 per cent tariff on US companies importing things from China. On Tuesday, China retaliated by announcing its own tariffs on some US products and an antitrust investigation into Google.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength, was trading 0.35 per cent lower at 107.58. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

HC to hear VW's $1.4B plea on 17 Feb

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Bombay High Court on Wednesday said it would hear on 17 February a plea filed by Skoda Auto Volkswagen India challenging the tax demand of USD 1.4 billion by Indian customs authorities.

The Volkswagen group, currently led in the country by Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, has been accused of deliberately misleading customs authorities through its mode of import of parts as individual units rather than as a component of a 'completely knocked down' (CKD) unit, which attracts higher import duty.

The automobile company last month filed a petition in the HC, challenging a show-cause notice issued by the authorities in September 2024 under the Customs Act.

On Wednesday, the company's counsels mentioned the plea before a division bench of Justices B P Colabawalla and Firdosh Pooniwalla, seeking urgent hearing.

The notice alleged that the company misclassified its imports of Audi, Skoda and Volkswagen cars as "individual parts" instead of "completely knocked down" (CKD) units, thereby paying significantly lower customs duties.

Some of the models include Octavia, Superb, Kodiaq, Passat, Jetta and Tiguan.

In July 2018, the Volkswagen Group announced investments of around 1 billion euros as part of the India 2.0 project. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

India, Oman FTA talks in progress

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The negotiations for a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and Oman are progressing at a healthy pace and the two sides will hold another round of talks to resolve the pending issues, an official said.

The official said that issues pertaining to petrochemical products have been resolved.

The negotiations received a much need impetus after the visit of Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to Muscat last month.

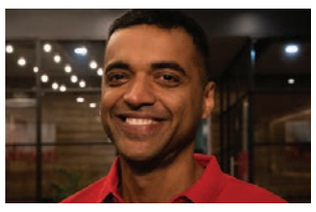
On 27 January in Muscat, trade ministers of India and Oman reviewed progress of the proposed agreement and focused on advancing the negotiations for the pact.

The agreement was discussed between Goyal and Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef.

Oman is the third largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries for India.

The bilateral trade has declined to USD 8.94 billion (exports USD 4.42 billion and imports USD 4.5 billion) in 2023-24 from USD 12.39 billion (exports USD 4.47 billion and imports USD 7.91 billion) in 2022-23. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI



NOBODY PAID TO WORK WITH ZOMATO: GOYAL

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Zomato Founder and CEO **Deepinder Goyal**, who recently faced online outrage for the eligibility criteria for a Chief of Staff vacancy, said on Wednesday that the company received over 18,000 applications, with 30 candidates offered various positions. He also clarified that "nobody paid anything to work with us."

In a "hiring update" post on X, he shared that 18 out of the 30 selected individuals have already joined Zomato (and other group companies like Blinkit) in "high-impact roles" and "they're being handsomely compensated" for the value they bring.

In an unusual job vacancy posting for Chief of Staff, the Zomato CEO in November asked prospective candidates to pay Rs 20 lakh for the first year, which in turn will be donated to non-profit Feeding India. *—PTI*

MONTHLY SURVEY

India's services sector sees slowest growth in 2 years in Jan

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

India's services sector activity expanded at the slowest pace in over two years in January amid softer increases in sales and output, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index fell from 59.3 in December to 56.5 in January -- its lowest level since November

In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

In contrast to the trend for total new orders, there was a quicker increase in international sales. Survey participants noted gains from clients in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the Americas. The overall rate of expansion hit a five-month high.

The survey noted that ongoing improvements in new business intakes and rising capacity pressures prompted service providers to recruit additional staff at the start of the last fiscal quarter.

According to them, full- and part-time positions had been filled.

The rate of job creation accelerated from December and was among the fastest seen since data collection started in December 2005.

Service providers in India were confident of a rise in business activity over the course of the coming 12 months. Some of the reasons listed for upbeat forecasts include advertising, efforts to price competitively and new client enquiries. *—PTI*

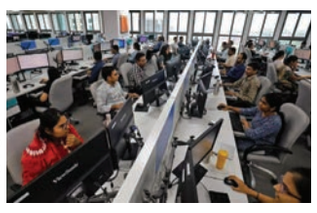


PHOTO: X

TECH LAYOFFS CONTINUE IN 2025

Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Meta, and 71 other tech giants fired people in January

- **7,000+** jobs cut this year
- **Reason:** AI revolution driving workforce restructuring

Key layoffs by major companies:

Amazon:

- Ongoing layoffs in communications & Sustainability divisions.
- 27,000 jobs cut since 2022.

Microsoft:

- Targeting underperforming employees.
- Layoffs in Security Division.
- No impact on India operations.

Meta:

- Cutting 3,600 jobs (~5% of workforce).
- **Focus:** "Raising the bar" on performance.

Google:

- Voluntary exit programme for Platforms & Devices team.
- Covers teams like Pixel, Android, Chrome, Nest.
- Severance packages offered.

Salesforce: 1,000 jobs slashed as part of cost-cutting measures.

Stripe: 300 employees to be laid off amid restructuring.

Man City: Bunny Shaw faced racist, misogynistic abuse

MANCHESTER, 5 FEB

Manchester City forward Khadija Bunny' Shaw has been subjected to "racist and misogynistic" abuse on social media, the club said Wednesday. City said the Jamaica international was targeted after Sunday's game against Arsenal and that it would give her its full support "following the disgusting treatment she's received." Shaw is one of the top women's soccer players in the world. City did not expand on the content of the messages, but said they had been forwarded to authorities. In 2023 world governing body FIFA said one in five players at the Women's World Cup that year received "targeted discriminatory, abusive or threatening messaging". Almost 50 per cent of "detected and verified" abusive messages from that tournament were homophobic, sexual and sexist, according to data from FIFA's Social Media Protection Service. —*PTI*

Guanyu joins Ferrari as reserve driver for F1 season

MARANELLO, 5 FEB

The first Chinese driver in Formula 1, Zhou Guanyu, is heading back to Ferrari as one of its reserve drivers for the 2025 season. Zhou doesn't have a race seat for 2025 after leaving Sauber at the end of last year but could step in if Charles Leclerc or Lewis Hamilton can't race. The 25-year-old Zhou first raced in F1 in 2022 for what was then the Alfa Romeo team, before it reverted back to the Sauber name. He has a best finish of eighth and has strong commercial and sponsorship backing in China. He was a Ferrari academy driver earlier in his career. Zhou is one of two reserves for Ferrari alongside another ex-Sauber driver, Antonio Giovinazzi, who last raced in F1 in 2021 and is a long-time reserve who has yet to drive for the team —*PTI*

Mumbai's Ranji QF against Haryana shifted to Eden

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Defending champions Mumbai's Ranji Trophy quarterfinal against Haryana has been shifted from Lahli to Kolkata by the BCCI. All the quarterfinals will be five-day affairs, from 8 to 12 February. Although no reason has been given for the change of venue, it is learnt that receding winter in the northern region could pose challenges like morning fog at Lahli and affect the proceedings. The Mumbai team, which has 42 Ranji titles to its credit, will feature stars such as India's T20 captain Suryakumar Yadav, all-rounder Shivam Dube, Shardul Thakur and skipper Ajinkya Rahane. The Haryana team will be headlined by seam-bowling sensation Anshul Kamboj. The other three quarterfinals are scheduled to be held in Rajkot (Saurashtra vs Gujarat), Nagpur (Vidarbha vs Tamil Nadu) and Pune (Jammu and Kashmir vs Kerala). —*PTI*

Telangana CM announces Rs 1 cr reward to cricketer

HYDERABAD, 5 FEB

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Wednesday announced Rs one crore cash reward to the upcoming woman cricketer Gongadi Trisha who came up with a magnificent performance during the recent ICC Women's U19 T20 World Cup at Kuala Lumpur. Trisha, who hails from Bhadrachalam in Telangana, called on the Chief Minister at his residence here. Reddy, who appreciated Trisha for her performance, wished that she continue her good form for the country in future. The Chief Minister also announced cash rewards of Rs 10 lakhs each to Dhruti Kesari, a member of the Under-19 World Cup team from Telangana, Under-19 World Cup team Head Coach Nausheen and trainer Shalini, an official release said. Trisha won the Player of Tournament award in the U19 World Cup. —*PTI*

CT face off: India look for balance against England

Rohit, Virat under tight scrutiny after their dismal run

NAGPUR, 5 FEB

Form and fitness of seasoned stars is under the scanner as India enter the final phase of their Champions Trophy preparations with the three-match ODI series against England starting here on Thursday, aiming to find the right balance for some specific slots in the line-up.

The likes of skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli have been under tremendous scrutiny after their dismal run in red-ball cricket. The two stars, after making hyped but disappointing appearances in Ranji Trophy last month, will be eyeing strong performances in a format that they have dominated for several years.

They were the top two run-getters of the 2023 World Cup with Kohli scoring 765 and Rohit smashing 597.

Since that World Cup, which India let slip in the final afer going unbeaten throughout, the two have only featured in a three-match ODI series loss to Sri Lanka where Rohit scored two fifties while Kohli didn't have a great run.

The slump intensified in Tests and in the last three months, the two heroes of India's most recent T20 World Cup triumph have faced numerous calls to decide on their future.

The ODI series against England is India's only tune-up tournament for the Champions Trophy, to be held in Pakistan and Dubai from February 19. The eight-team competition could be a make-or-break event for the two stalwarts who have already retired from T20Is. —*PTI*

Team India during a training session PHOTO: PTI

Rohit plays down reports on future

NAGPUR, 5 FEB

Indian captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday played down speculations about his future in international cricket, saying it is irrelevant to talk about his career at a time when he is "focussed" on the three ODIs against England and ICC Champions Trophy.

"How it is relevant when there are three ODIs and a Champions Trophy. The reports (on my future) are going on for a number of years and I am not here to clarify those reports," Rohit said at the pre-match press conference.

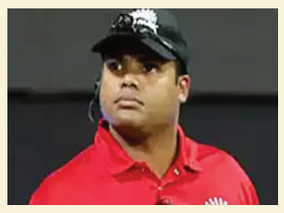
"For me, the three games (against England) and the Champions Trophy is very important. My focus is on these games and I will see what happens thereafter," the India skipper added.

Meanwhile, Former skipper Ravi Shastri reckons that Jasprit Bumrah's potential absence could severely weaken the Indian team in the Champions Trophy but advised against rushing the premier fast bowler's return to the national side. —*PTI*

India's ICC elite panel umpire Nitin opts out

DUBAI, 5 FEB

India's only representative in the ICC Elite Panel of Umpires, Nitin Menon, has opted out of officiating in the Champions Trophy in Pakistan this month due to personal reasons. The ICC on Wednesday announced a list of 15 match officials scheduled to commence in Karachi. Australian legend David Boon, Sri Lankan great great Ranjan Madugalle and Zimbabwe's Andrew Pycroft were named as match referees for the eight-team tournament. "The ICC wanted to put him (Menon) on the Champions Trophy roster. But he decided against travelling to Pakistan due to personal reasons," a BCCI source said. —*PTI*



SHINING STAR

Suruchi bags gold as Haryana leads 10m air pistol event

DEHRADUN, 5 FEB

Haryana's Suruchi won the gold medal in the women's 10m air pistol shooting competition with a remarkable score of 245.7 at the National Games here on Wednesday.

Palak, also from Haryana, secured the silver medal with 243.6, while Simranpreet Kaur Brar from Punjab took home the bronze with a score of 218.8 as the Trishool Shooting Range saw some intense competition on the day.

The men's 50m rifle 3 positions event saw 33 participants from various states competing for a spot in the final round of eight shooters.

After a highly competitive qualification stage, Madhya Pradesh's Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (598), Services Sports Control Board's (SSCB) Chain Singh (594), Niraj Kumar (591) and Nishan Bhudha (589), Maharashtra's Swapnil Suresh Kusale (588), Uttar Pradesh's Akhil Sheoran (587), Madhya Pradesh's Goldi Gurjar (587), and SSCB's Ganga Singh (587) qualified for the final.

The final round for the men's 50m rifle 3 positions event is scheduled for Thursday. PTI

Olympian rower Balraj Panwar shines with gold

Paris Olympian Balraj Panwar, who narrowly missed out on a bronze medal at the Asian Games in China last year, strengthened his status as one of the country's top rowers as he defended his men's single scull gold at the National Games here on Wednesday.

Panwar, born in Haryana but competing for Services here, clocked 7 minute and 26.68 seconds to row past the 2km distance and take the first place at the Water Sports Complex here. Navdeep Singh (7:41.17) of Uttarakhand and Guru Pratap Singh (8:04.01) of Maharashtra took the silver and bronze. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

● Haryana's Suruchi won the gold medal in the women's 10m air pistol shooting competition with a remarkable score of 245.7 at the National Games here on Wednesday

Veer Ahlawat PHOTO: PTI

AHLAWAT CONFIDENT OF DP TOUR, ALL SET FOR QATAR

DOHA, 5 FEB

India's Veer Ahlawat on Wednesday said he is finding his feet on the DP World Tour as he got ready to play for the fourth week in a row at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters 2025 here.

The other Indian in the field is the more experienced Shubhankar Sharma.

Ahlawat, who started the year at Hero Dubai Desert Classic but missed the cut, has since figured in the weekend rounds of the Ras Al Khaimah Championships and the Bapco Bahrain Championships. He was T-27 in Ras Al Khaimah and T-49 in Bahrain.

Saying he is improving and gathering experience with each round, Ahlawat is focussed on making the best use of the opportunity he has got on the DPWT, where he reached by topping the Indian PGTI Tour.

The two Tours have an alliance by which the OOM (Order of Merit) winner in India gets a card to DPWT —*PTI*

Diksha, Tvesa joined by rookie Avani in Morocco

RABAT, 5 FEB

The experienced Diksha Dagar and Tvesa Malik will be joined by rookie Avani Prashanth as the Indian women's challenge on the Ladies European Tour (LET) begins this week with the Lalla Meryem Cup at Royal Golf Dar Es Salam.

Avani will be making her debut in a pro event after coming through the LET Q-School.

Pranavi Urs, the top ranked Indian at 17th in last year's LET Order of Merit, will start her season next week at Aramco Series in Riyadh. Pranavi will join Diksha, Tvesa and Aditi Ashok.

Thereafter Pranavi, Diksha and Avani will proceed for three events to Australia.

Diksha has fine memories of the 2024 Lalla Meryem Cup, where she finished in Top-10 and she will be looking to better that. Interestingly Pranavi, who was tied fifth last year, is skipping the event this season.

Tvesa returns to the event after a long gap since 2019 when she made the cut and finished T-41.

Avani will be the first of the Indians to tee off and she goes from the 10th with Blanca Fernandez of Spain and Thailand's Aunchisa Utama at 8.50 am.

Tvesa Malik is paired with Sanna Nuutinen of Finland and Norwegian Dorthea Forbrigd from 10th tee at 1 pm and Diksha will play with Slovenian Pia Babnik and Local star Ines Laklalech from the 10th tee at 140pm —*PTI*

GIANT LEAP

Abhishek skyrockets to second spot in T20 batters' ranking

DUBAI, 5 FEB

In-form India opener Abhishek Sharma leapfrogged 38 places to the second spot in the ICC Men's T20I Player Rankings for batters while his teammate Tilak Verma dropped a rung to the third place on Wednesday.

Abhishek produced the best innings of his fledging international career when he smashed a quick-fire 135 in the fifth and final T20 against England in Mumbai, leading India to a thumping 4-1 series win.

Abhishek's innings came off just 54 deliveries and was adorned with 13 sixes. It was the highest score by an Indian men's player in the shortest format.

As a result, the 24-year-old zoomed to the second spot in the latest ranking.

Australia star Travis Head continues to lead the T20I batters' chart, but Abhishek is just 26 rating points behind him following his record-breaking effort at Wankhede.

Skipper Suryakumar Yadav is placed fifth and all within striking distance of Head, while his India teammates Hardik Pandya (up five rungs to equal 51st) and Shivam Dube (up 38 spots to 58th) also moved up the rankings chart following some good scores against England.

Yashavi Jaiswal remained on the fourth spot in the Test batters list, which is being headed by England's Joe Root, followed by Harry Brook and New Zealand's Kane Williamson.

Jasprit Bumrah, who is recovering from back spasm, maintained his top spot. He was recently named ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year and ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year. —*PTI*

Abhishek Sharma

IGF raps IOA, backs Brijinder

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

International Golf Federation (IGF) has strongly objected to Indian Olympic Association's interference in the Indian Golf Union elections, and recognising the rival faction led by Harish Kumar Shetty, saying the IOA has "no jurisdiction" over the federation's poll process. The IOA had given recognition to the IGU led by Shetty while declaring the other body, headed by Brijinder Singh, void in a letter issued on December 30.

In a strongly-worded letter to IOA president PT Usha, IGF executive director Antony Scanlon, said the world body fully supports the election won by the Singh faction held on 15 December.

Shetty and Singh held separate elections and AGMs under different Returning Officers (ROs).

The election of Shetty's faction was conducted by retired Allahabad High Court judge OP Garg, while Singh was re-elected in polls conducted by retired Punjab and Haryana High Court judge, Rameshwar Malik.

The Sports Ministry has also pulled up the IOA for recognising IGU elections won by the Shetty-led faction.

Scanlon also hit out at the IOA for removing golf from the ongoing National Games roster —*PTI*

● The IOA had given recognition to the IGU led by Shetty while declaring the other body, headed by Brijinder Singh, void in a letter issued on 30 December.

MI CapeTown defeat Paarl Royal to enter SA20 final

GQEBERHA, 5 FEB

MI CapeTown defeated Paarl Royals by 39 runs in the First Qualifier to enter their maiden SA20 final here.

The final will be played at the Wanderers on Saturday, while Paarl Royals will play the Second Qualifier on Thursday against the winner of the Eliminator between two-times champion Sunrisers Eastern Cape and Joburg Super Kings on Wednesday.

MI CapeTown scored 199 for 4 and then dismissed Paarl Royals for 160 in 19.4 overs.

In-form openers Rassie Van Der Dussen (40 off 32 balls, 3 fours and 2 sixes) and Ryan Rickelton (44 off 27, 4 fours and 2 sixes) again gave MI CapeTown a flying start, smashing 66 runs in powerplay.

This was MI CapeTown's fifth win on the trot this season, having last lost to the same team on January 15 at Paarl, while it was the hat-trick of loss for Paarl Royals. —*PTI*

WPL important for ODI World Cup: Harmanpreet

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

India and Mumbai Indians' captain Harmanpreet Kaur believes the upcoming edition of the Women's Premier League will play a big role in preparation for the ODI World Cup which the country is hosting later this year. She also said that the India U-19 women's team has set a new benchmark with their second T20 World Cup title win in Malaysia recently.

"Our U-19 team is setting a benchmark with back-to-back trophies and it's a very proud moment for all of us," she added.

Jhulan Goswami, MI's bowling coach and team mentor, said their side has a "quality core team" for WPL and domestic players have also been impressive. "All of them are very quality (players), they have done very well in domestic cricket and they have performed really well. One of them has just now won the U-19 (T20) World Cup, G Kamalini... (and there is) Sanskriti Gupta too," Goswami said. —*PTI*

READY FOR THE SHOW

India names Dutch, German badminton squad

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

National U-17 champion Gnana Dattu T will lead India's 17-member squad at the Dutch Junior and German Junior badminton to be played in February and March this year.

The squad also includes junior world number six Raunak Chouhan, Adarshini Shri and doubles specialists Bhavya Chhabra and Param Chaudhary, among others.

The Dutch Junior International will be played in Haarlem, Netherlands from 26 February to 2 March, while the German Junior will be held in Mulheim an der Ruhr from 5–9 March.

PHOTO: PTI

The Indian contingent consists of four boys and girls singles players each, two boys doubles and two girls doubles combinations, and two mixed doubles pairs.

The squad was selected based on the BAI guidelines, granting direct entry to winners of the All India Junior Ranking Tournament (U-19) in Hyderabad, while the remaining spots were filled through selection trials held in New Delhi, featuring top-ranked players and semifinalists from the Hyderabad event.

Surya Charisma Tamiri had bagged the girls' singles bronze medal in the 2024 German Junior, while Ayush Shetty had won the boys' singles bronze medal a year earlier before going on to clinch the 2023 world junior bronze.

RMV Gurusai Dutt is the only Indian boy's singles player to win the Dutch Junior International gold medal back in 2008 -- the same year he also clinched the Commonwealth Youth Games gold and the world junior bronze medal.

India squad:

Boys Singles: Rounak Chouhan, Gnana Dattu TT, Suryaksh Rawat, Pranauv Ram N

Girls Singles: Adarshini Shri, Tanoo Chandra, Rujula Ramu, Tanvi Reddy Andluri

Boys Doubles: Bhavya Chhabra/Param Chaudhary, Mithilesh PK/Vishnu Kedar Kode

Girls Doubles: Pragati Parida/Vishakha Toppo, Anaya Bisht/Angel Punera

Mixed Doubles: Bhavya Chhabra/Angel Punera, Lairamsanga C/Vishakha Toppo. —*PTI*